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ABSTRACT

Designed to use recent research on revision activities and personal error analysis, a classroom study compared grades on papers written by students with and without specific instruction and practice in revising and proofreading techniques. Detailed statistical analyses of two writing assignments revealed no significant difference in grade achievement between the revision and the nonrevision groups. In addition, although 89% of the students receiving an "A" grade on first drafts in the revision group rewrote their papers four out of five possible times, only 58% of the whole revision group did more than a minimal rewrite on their first draft. These findings suggest that average or below average students may have needed more time to revise than was allotted in the program and that grades were not a motivating factor in revisions. While not producing concrete evidence of the benefits of revision, the experiment suggests that discovery revision activities and proofreading and editing heuristics are helpful, even if not absolutely necessary, for stronger writers. (MM)

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Teaching Revision: An Experiment

Peggy Irene Pavlisin

First of all, let me be very honest with you and say that the classroom experiment with teaching revision which is reviewed here largely yielded those figures which statisticians term "no significant difference." When the grades of my community college technical writing students who were taught and practiced revising techniques were compared to those of students from a control group who followed a traditional assign-write-grade pattern of instruction, each group performed equally well. Possibly I learned more about revision as a process than did my students. Actually it is the reading and thinking about revision as a process and the in-depth examination of the work done by the experimental revision group which are the focus here. I would like to share with you the following: (1) an overview of the relationship between revision and our current understanding of writing as process; (2) a brief summary of several practical instructional approaches to teaching revising activities; and (3) a description of my specific classroom experiment in teaching a six-week unit on revising and proofreading to community college students together with a brief summary of pertinent findings and conclusions from that study.

Only five years ago Cooper and Odell made a call for research on the composing process, raising the issues and questions related to research when the center of interest is the process of writing instead of the writing produced. The recent use of the term "process research" (I often find myself saying "process instruction.") indicates the discipline's response and the extent of the shift toward research in composition which takes into account the process of writing as well as the writing produced. Much good has come of these efforts: We now have valuable information (1) about the methodology of observing writing in process, (2) about the developmental stages of writing

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skills, and (3) about the heuristic procedures through which a writer finds a topic and its supporting ideas.

Similar to the studies which have enlarged the understanding of invention as a process and have resulted in useful and varied heuristic methods (tagememics, pre-writing, problem-solving, etc.), [1] studies are needed which advance understanding of revising as a part of the total writing process. There is a need to connect the process of discovery of content with the processes of revision, rethinking, rewriting, editing and proofreading. Revision, like invention, by its very nature requires a process view of composition. The activities of revising, activities occurring both during and at the end of the composing process, cannot be fully explored unless the acts of writing are scruitinized as much as are student papers, unless the student develops the ability to make use of the discovery possibilities within revision.

Composition instruction which mainly emphasizes the production of a finished essay will define revision largely in terms of applying proofreading and editing skills, the finding and correcting of errors in already completed papers. In process instruction, the definition of revision is expanded to include rewriting activities which can occur throughout the writing process as well as at the end. If the discovery nature of revision is to be taken seriously, multiple drafts become an accepted, although hard to handle, fact.

Various factors have hindered instructors from placing emphasis upon revising procedures. Within the discipline we have not clearly and consistently defined for ourselves and our students what is meant by revising, proofreading, and editing. The primary problems, however, are heavy instructional loads, crowded classes, and course plans which allow for few, if any, opportunities for students to develop one assignment through several drafts.

Even if not always integrated into classroom practice, there is a well articulated theory of revision as a recursive discovery process. In fact, two related ideas relevent to revision activities run through the composition studies which place process at the center of interest: (1) the possibility of the discovery of new ideas through the shaping and reshaping which goes on throughout the composing process and (2) the dual recursive and linear nature of revision activities.

Revision as Discovery

Several writers suggest the importance of content and arrangement discoveries found in revision activities:

"In working over the symbols on the page, arranging and rearranging, seeing how some words lead to others, some statements lead to new questions, some new questions lead to new insights, the writer finds that he is not only composing words, he is composing his experience."[2]

Speaking even more strongly, Murray states, "Students are driven to revise, to re-read, and to re-write--in order to find out what they have to say."[3] He sees learning to discover meaning through the writing process as the most significant step a student writer can take. Instead of prewriting, writing, and rewriting, Murray proposes terms which stress the discovered involved: pervision, vision, and revision. He lists four aspects of discovery of the process of revision:

1. Discoveries of content gained by gathering new information and by seeing relationships formed by separate bits of information;
2. Discoveries related to form and structure in which the writer's ordering or structuring process brings the writer toward meaning;
3. Discoveries related to language in which words are explored to extend and discover meaning;

4. Discoveries of voice during which the writer establishes point of view, authority, and distance from the subject.[4]

Mandel discards the traditional "think-write" or "outline-write" concepts and contends that what is actually written during the composing process is different, either subtly or dramatically, from what the writer thought. Mandel outlines three steps of the composing process: idea, writing, and attending to what is written to judge and edit it. It is the act of writing that produces the discoveries which will be the finished product. According to Mandel, the process itself unfolds truths which the mind then learns.[5]

Primeau also contends that the editing process creates the meaning and that the meaning of the whole is changed, focused or sharpened by editing. He recommends no rein upon the composing stage since the writer must produce enough material from which to choose a specific focus, much as a film editor must have excess footage with which to work.[6]

The Activities of Revision

In addition to revealing the discovery involved in revision, current research also helps to clarify the dual recursive and linear nature of revision, showing how the processes of revision actually go much beyond changing of surface errors after a paper is completed.

Perl defines recursiveness as the process by which the writer returns, as needed, to parts of the overall process and performs short, successive steps that yield results on which the writer draws in taking the next set of steps. Based upon her observations of student writers, she names three observable recursive acts: (1) rereading parts of the discourse, (2) returning to some key word or item called upon by the topic, and (3) rechecking the "felt sense" or inner feeling about the topic and its shape being formed by writing.[7] Other

studies show that strong writers are able to use pauses to plan and to rehearse what to write next and to check to see if the new idea fits while remedial writers are not able to look to their writing for answers to composing problems.[8] The linear operations of composing do exist; yet within the linear sequence, meaningful recursive activities occur which generate positive revision.

Empirical studies of student behaviors during revision are revealing. Conducting what he termed an informal, exploratory study of the kinds of self-evaluation strategies employed by extensive revisers and nonrevisers, Beach observed some characteristics of each group:

Extensive Revisers	Nonrevisers
Saw revising as a process of making major alterations in content and substance	Saw revising as the process of making minor alterations in form and tended to use textbook terms to identify problems, for example, "choppy sentences"
Saw free writing as a tentative record to be reformulated for an audience	Felt that once thought was expressed little reworking for an audience was needed.
Delayed audience considerations until an appropriate point	Inhibited by too early considerations of audience
Viewed a paper in holistic terms	Viewed a paper line by line or by separate problems rather than holistically, hampering the next draft
Predicted necessary changes and could predict the degree of success of changes	Retained an ego-centric perspective and could not consider alternative approaches
Understood that revision leads to additional drafts	Lost interest in papers and the need to revise and often set time or effort limits to be expended on one paper[9]

Sommers also found that experienced writers, but not inexperienced writers, were willing and able to use the writing process to discover the shape and form of a piece and held a holistic perspective along with the belief that revision

is recursive in nature, having significant recurring activities which can be repeated at will. Using the case study approach, Sommers identified four revision operations: deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering. She also identified four levels at which changes can take place: word, phrase, sentence, and theme (the extended statement of an idea).[10]

In addition, there is a substantial body of writing which reports instructional practices used to teach revising and proofreading. All studies stress revision as a positive process, and most suggest that composition instruction needs to allow time for multiple drafts of a paper. Instructional techniques for revision and proofreading range from a formal heuristic procedure to multiple readings of one paper with varying purposes each time and include activities which are both individual and group centered.

The question of multiple drafts is crucial. Behind the use of multiple revisions is the reality of the composing process itself: writers cannot pay attention to everything successfully at one time. The kind of instructor commentary given to various drafts is important. Walshe suggests that undeveloped papers should not receive full grading but should instead receive a questioning response which is designed to initiate more thought by the author[11] McDonald emphasizes the psychological shift for the instructor in looking at a paper not in terms of what has been done, but in terms of what needs to be done. He provides a useful outline of the type of grading which is typically called for in each successive draft:

> First draft commentary: Read through to determine if the paper has one focus or several. Focus remarks on only those sections which contain fruitful possibilities for the second draft. Raise the questions which will help the student see additional possibilities of the direction already started. If the paper has a central focus, look at the clarity and basic coherence of the whole. Raise questions concerning the adequacy of content and connections made. Leave mechanics and grammar commentary untouched except for warnings or direction concerning repeated types of error.

Second draft commentary: Here more attention can be given to matters of sentence structure and usage problems. However, such matters would still be ignored if content, organization, coherence, and clarity needed improvement.

Graded draft commentary: Here the instructor pays full attention to all elements of a paper, keeping in mind that a revised paper is not necessarily an "A" paper.[12]

Along with others, Pferrer suggests that instruction in revision must take into account the fact that initial writer-centered drafts must go through revision to become reader-centered. She uses the term "re-seeing" as the process by which a writer looks again at successive drafts. According to Pferrer, writer-based writing is characterized as follows: having a single point of view without awareness of other possibilities; having form which is primarily a record of the writer's flow of thoughts and lacking in other organizing principles; lacking in expressed causal relations, developed ideas, and supporting evidence; and containing private code words having little meaning for the reader.[13]

The task of decentering the student writer from writer-based prose is the heart of instruction in revision and is sometimes accomplished in a variety of ways: a complex heuristic such as the TCDIDC model, multiple reading, oral reading, group revising, and question asking. Thompson suggests nine readings done by the writer, each reading having a different focus.[14] Stine urges the use of oral reading by students who are attempting to revise. He claims that there is an immediacy in the oral reading process that is not present in silent reading, and, therefore, the listener's reaction to the writer's lapses will surface readily during oral reading and are likely to be clearly heard even if the listener cannot fully explain the error. Students learn to hear thesis statements and supporting evidence as well as to hear grammatical and syntactical mistakes.[15]

Group revising is also typical of instruction in revision which uses peer editing. Working in small groups, students offer advice to each other in turn. Shuman recommends a two stage process: after a first reading, the group offers "criticism, suggestions, corrections or revisions" to each other in turn. Then the student produces a second draft which the same group goes over, this time doing the necessary proofreading and editing which will result in the strongest paper possible.[16] Students can discontinue such group work after three or so sessions.

Addressing herself to the classroom teacher of composition, Kuhlmann suggests several tactics to use in teaching students to revise: design a series of forms for the students to use to analyze writing; choose exemplary themes for students to use as patterns; select specific areas ranging from content through mechanics that are to be reviewed; allow students to revise in pairs and groups; use personalized, creative approaches to correct specific weaknesses; and use group composition with each group assuming responsibility for one composing task.[17]

It may be that in the finding and correcting of grammatical and stylistic errors, a step which provides needed polish to a finished paper, students need more individual attention than at any point in the revising process. Personal error analysis, often concentrating upon only a few serious errors at a time, seems to yield the best results. Following the model of Shaughnessy,[18] instructor and student can work together to discover reasons behind repeated errors. Once the habit of personal error analysis is established, a careful record of types of repeated errors should be kept by the student and periodically reviewed by the instructor in case additional instruction is needed.

A Classroom Experiment in Revision

Keeping in mind that research reveals much about the recursive, discovery qualities of revision activities, that there exist exciting and practical suggestions for presenting the principles of revision to students, that personal error analysis is a positive way of handling editing and proofreading skills, I designed a classroom study to compare grades on papers written by students who had specific instruction and practice in revising/proofreading techniques to grades on like assignments written by students who had not received any direct instruction in revision or proofreading.

Methodology

Figure 1 demonstrates the revising heuristic used by the experimental group being taught revision strategies. Through multi-level analysis, students first considered the total paper and then its parts, moving through the steps of holistic analysis, sentence analysis, and personal error analysis as illustrated.

Instruction first focused upon teaching the student to respond to reader expectation concerning overall form and pattern of arrangement of content, an especially important consideration in the technical writing these students were doing. Using an overhead projector and model papers, students practiced judging a paper holistically, applying the varying expectations for each assigned form (description of a mechanism, definition of a technical term or concept, etc.) as well as expectations for the chosen content. The students brought that holistic judgment to bear upon their own papers, placing reader expectations in the forefront. Strong and weak models drawn from actual student papers for the current assignment were examined. Strong models were generally favored so that students could make direct comparisons of their own work to the well developed model before revising.

At the second level of instruction in revision, students learned to be aware of alternative sentence structures. Working from their knowledge of embedded structures taught in the previous composition course, students practiced noting effective sentence structures within strong models. Working in groups, students revised sentences within sample papers to achieve both variety and exactness of expression. Moving to their own writing for that assignment, students noted their own use of embedded structures. Instruction included a review of the commonly used embedded structures (verbal phrases, clauses, and coordinated elements) as well as parallel structures and absolute phrases. Students practiced sentence improvement using actual sentences from current work. Finally, students looked at their own papers to find opportunities for sentence revision.

A third and intensive level of instruction was in proofreading and was termed, for classroom working purposes, personal error analysis. Students attempted to separate their errors caused by merely overlooking an incorrectly used form from other errors which went undiscovered because of a misunderstood or unlearned rule or concept. This instruction was quite individual since each student kept an informal cumulative error analysis sheet of all errors under the appropriate heading of "seeing" (overlooked) problem or "knowing" (misunderstood or unlearned rule or concept) problem. Instruction and practice in personal error analysis was a part of each assignment during the six-week writing unit which emphasized revising and allowed for assignment of grades only after a paper had gone through one or more drafts. Students were urged to examine errors for wrong reasoning. Sessions included reteaching grammar and punctuation as needed, group practice in finding surface errors, and group practice in error correction in student sentences. Students were encouraged

to proofread aloud to a peer or to themselves. Each student had several practice sessions of reading aloud to the instructor or a peer who intervened only after the reader had ample time to discover and correct errors.

That, briefly, was the pattern of instruction concerning revision strategies. The control group followed a traditional assign-write-grade pattern of work.

Findings

Detailed statistical analyses of two separate writing assignments done by the experimental group (taught revision strategies and doing multiple drafts) and the control group (taught according to the assign-write-grade pattern) revealed no significant difference in grade achievement, i.e., one group wrote as well as the other. Since there was no significant difference in grade achievement between the revision and nonrevision groups when papers were graded both holistically and analytically (using error count and embedded structures count), we can conclude that much of what is considered effective revising practice is taught and learned indirectly. If revisions are not allowed, the student takes what he or she learns from a graded assignment and applies it to the next, developing personal strategies to meet expectations. Even a post experiment questionnaire concerning revising habits and attitudes revealed no significant difference between the two groups.

The most revealing information gleaned from the experiment surfaced in the analyses of data collected from the experimental group.

Student participation in revision opportunities was a basic assumption of the experimental condition. Analyses of information regarding the degree of participation in revision and the quality of rewritten papers provided important information. Figure 2 summarizes these findings. Only 69 percent

of the first draft papers were revised, and 11 percent of these papers were minimumly or unacceptably reworked. Within revisions the incidence of different errors or uncaught errors was noted, and 19 percent of the acceptably revised papers contained different or uncaught errors.

Figure 3 pinpoints the problem of revision instruction which is fast paced (being both process and product centered) and forces students to move to another assignment while the second or third draft of the first paper is being completed. Assuming that students are allowed multiple drafts before a paper is graded, it seemed interesting to note whether revisers or nonrevisers most often received an "A" grade on the first draft or first attempt over five assignments. As shown in Figure 3, 89 percent of the "A" grades assigned to papers during the first draft stage were written by students who completed at least four out of five possible rewrites. Possibly, the information suggests that students who did more revisions received better grades. However, the reverse may be a more accurate statement: Students who made better grades completed (were able to complete) more revisions. These were probably stronger students with fewer errors to correct. Evidence from error count analysis pointed to the possibility that the students who did three or fewer revisions out of five possible (45 percent of the total experimental group) were students making a larger number of errors than those students completing more revisions. Multiple draft opportunities and delaying of grading of papers until after revision did not become a motivating force for the student at the average and below average end of the scale. The amount of time allotted for completion of revisions was no doubt unrealistic for students who must deal with several kinds of error at one time. Instruction which accommodates multiple drafts must be designed in such a way that students can move at varying rates through

several assignments. Time to do adequate revisions must be built into a work schedule, even if the number of assignments required is lowered for some students. For average and below average students, getting psychologically involved in the discovery and learning possibilities of revision activities without excessive product pressure will need to replace grade motivation. Substantial grade improvement is a far-off, not easily attainable, goal for such students; learning the processes of doing revision is quite attainable and can become a worthwhile goal in itself.

Figure 4 reveals the individuality of error and the need for individualized error analysis and correction as an aid to proofreading skills. The errors in punctuation covered most of the conventions of punctuation. Of course, punctuation errors may hide other weaknesses since punctuation requires a thorough understanding of underlying sentence structures and elements. If run-on sentence errors were added to punctuation errors, the figure would be over one-third of the errors noted. Within the experimental group personal error analysis and applied grammar instruction concerning these common errors resulted in a statistically significant reduction in run-ons and punctuation errors between the beginning and end of the experimental treatment (see Table 5).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this classroom experiment in teaching revising and proofreading strategies to community college students seemed to reveal that recursive, discovery revision activities and proofreading and editing heuristics are helpful, even if not absolutely necessary, for stronger students. It was the average and below average students who were not accommodated by the design of this experiment in teaching revision strategies. Grades did not prove to be the force which would generate more hours spent in doing the

processes of revising resulting in multiple drafts of every assignment. Attempts need to be made to ensure that students who must deal with several kinds of error at once at least practice doing the processes of revision if not produce the perfectly revised paper because it is the strategies of revision, whether taught directly or indirectly, which are helping the stronger students become experienced writers. With average and below average writers, process emphasis should probably take precedence over product emphasis, expecially in instruction in revision. Doing two process assignments would, no doubt, have been more helpful for the average and below average writers in this experiment than doing the five product assignments. Possibly process instruction cannot realistically be placed on a product schedule at all. The psychologically positive learning situation of "knowing how" is a worthy instructional goal in itself when what we know about revision is taken into account: the richness and depth generated by recursive, discovery strategies and the pleasing reader approval of a fully executed, carefully proofread final product. From "knowing how" learners can eventually move to doing, if not in one semester then in the next.

FIGURE 1

MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS--A GUIDE FOR REVISING AND PROOFREADING

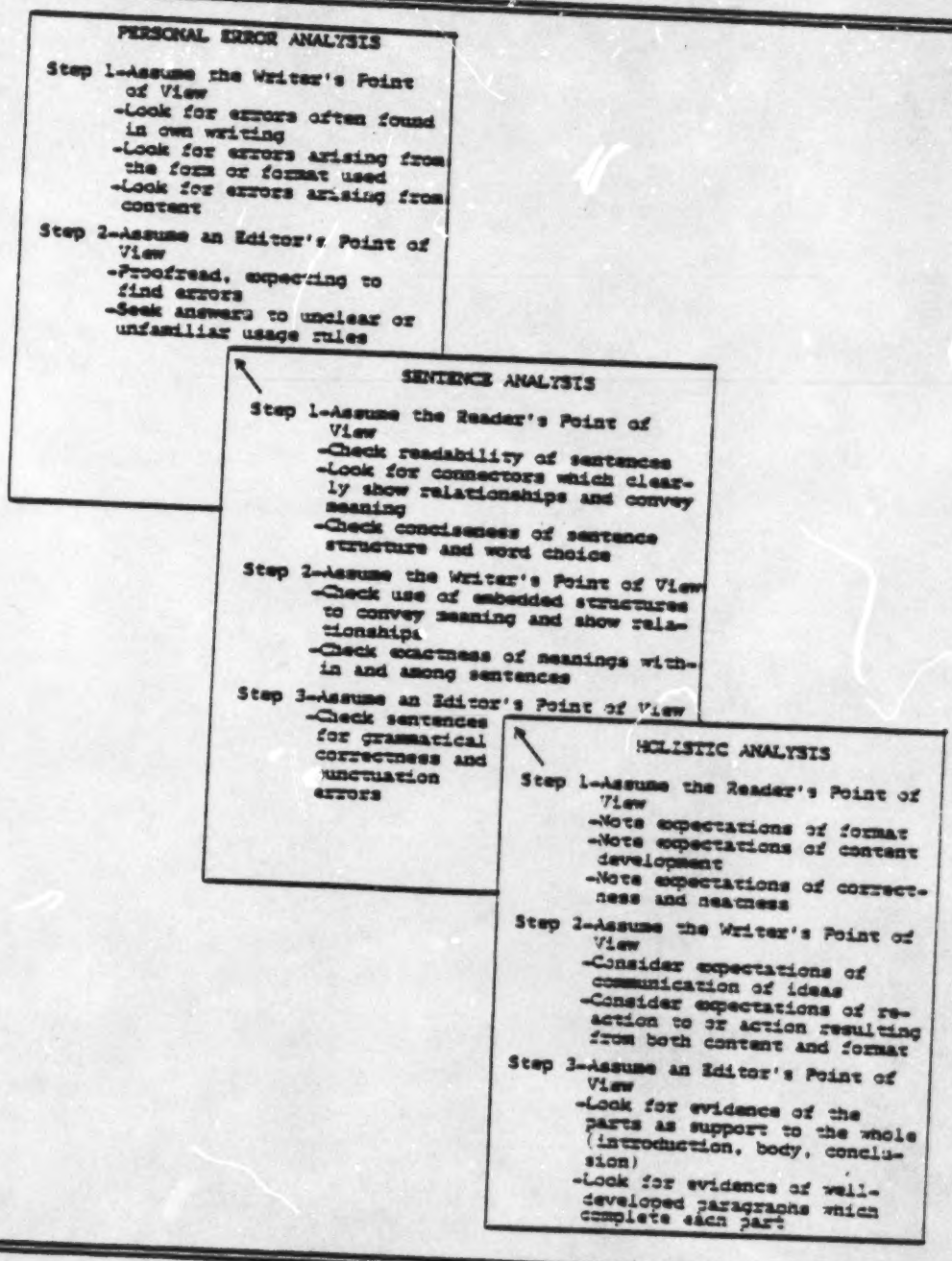
PERSONAL ERROR ANALYSIS
Step 1-Assume the Writer's Point of View
-Look for errors often found in own writing
-Look for errors arising from the form or format used
-Look for errors arising from content
Step 2-Assume an Editor's Point of View
-Proofread, expecting to find errors
-Seek answers to unclear or unfamiliar usage rules
SENTENCE ANALYSIS
Step 1-Assume the Reader's Point of View
-Check readability of sentences
-Look for connectors which clearly show relationships and convey meaning
-Check conciseness of sentence structure and word choice
Step 2-Assume the Writer's Point of View
-Check use of embedded structures to convey meaning and show relationships
-Check exactness of meanings within and among sentences
Step 3-Assume an Editor's Point of View
-Check sentences for grammatical correctness and punctuation errors
HOLISTIC ANALYSIS
Step 1-Assume the Reader's Point of View
-Note expectations of format
-Note expectations of content development
-Note expectations of correctness and neatness
Step 2-Assume the Writer's Point of View
-Consider expectations of communication of ideas
-Consider expectations of reaction to or action resulting from both content and format
Step 3-Assume an Editor's Point of View
-Look for evidence of the parts as support to the whole (introduction, body, conclusion)
-Look for evidence of well-developed paragraphs which complete each part

FIGURE 2

ANALYSIS OF REVISIONS BY NUMBER AND QUALITY
(EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ONLY)

	Number
Total Revisions Possible	243 (100%)
Total Unrevised Papers	75 (31%)
Total Revisions Attempted	170 (69%)
Total Acceptable Revisions	152 (89%)[a]
Total Unacceptable Revisions	18 (11%)

[a] 19 percent of Acceptable Revisions contained different or uncaught errors

FIGURE 3

ANALYSIS OF FORTY-FOUR "A" GRADES ASSIGNED TO PAPERS ON FIRST ATTEMPT BY NUMBER OF TOTAL REVISIONS COMPLETED (EXPERIMENTAL GROUP ONLY)

Number of Students	Total Number of Revisions Completed Out of 5 Possible	Number of As Received on First Attempt
18	5	31 (71%)
9	4	8 (18%)
7	3	5 (11%)
7	2	0
7	1	0
1	0	0

FIGURE 4

ANALYSIS OF TOTAL ERRORS BY TYPES IN FIVE TECHNICAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS--BEFORE REVISION (WRITTEN DURING EXPERIMENTAL TREATMENT BY EXPERIMENTAL STUDENTS ONLY)

Error Type	Number	Percent of Total Errors
Punctuation and Capitalization	288	27
Spelling	139	13
Run-on Sentences	112	10
Awkward Sentence Structure	82	8
Content	77	7
Verb Errors	66	6
Pronoun Usage	64	6
Diction	60	6
Fragments	37	3
Possessives	33	3
Typing Errors or Lack of Neatness	31	3
Noun Endings	27	3
Contractions	24	2
Adjective-adverb Confusion	7	1

FIGURE 5

ANALYSIS OF ERROR FREQUENCIES BY SPECIFIC ERROR ON FIRST AND LAST PAPERS--BEFORE REVISION (WRITTEN DURING EXPERIMENTAL TREATMENT: N = 26)

Type of Error	Mean Errors First Paper	Mean Errors Last Paper	Mean Dif.	Standard Error	t-value
Spelling	1.00	0.50	.460	.280	1.64
Run-ons	1.34	0.38	.960	.454	2.11[a]
Fragments	0.26	0.07	.190	.173	1.09
Pronoun	0.46	0.19	.269	.194	1.38
Verb	0.30	0.26	.038	.170	0.22
Punctuation and Capitalization	1.73	0.88	.846	.382	2.21[a]
Diction	0.34	0.19	.153	.225	0.68
Awkward Sentences	1.34	0.61	.730	.389	1.87
Possessives	0.30	0.19	.269	.187	1.43
Content	0.57	0.30	.269	.268	1.00
Typos, Appearance	0.38	0.15	.230	.167	1.37
Contractions	0.26	0.03	.230	.167	1.37
Adjective, Adverb	0.11	0.00	.115	.063	2.46[a]
Noun Endings	0.11	0.30	.115	.126	0.91

DF = 25

[a]Significant at the .05 level

NOTES

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[13]Suzanne Pferrer, The Effects of Multiple Revision on Freshman Writing (ERIC ED 191 048), pp. 6-11.

[14]George J. Thompson, "Revision: Nine Ways to Achieve A Disinterested Perspective," College Composition and Communication, 29(1978), 201-02.

[15]Peter Stine, "Listen, My Children, and You Shall Hear": An Oral Approach to Correcting Written Errors (ERIC ED 144 601), p. 8.

[16]R. Baird Shuman, "What About Revision?" English Journal, 64(1975), 42.

[17]Sondra Mose Kuhlmann, "A Positive Approach To Revisions," College Student Journal, 14(1980), 184-85.

[18]Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 18.